

## Comments to FCC regarding pay restructure and future of VRS for Deaf users

It is with deep concern about the future of VRS that I submit these comments and strongly urge the FCC to reconsider the recent pay restructure that has resulted in a reduction of service and may mean the eventual loss of these services.

Imagine if you will that a member of your family, possibly your mother, is in a hospital in another state. Today, members of your family will gather in her room, in person and by phone to decide whether or not to continue life support. You are unable to be there in person and because you are Deaf, you are unable to connect to the family by phone. Because of Video Relay, you CAN call the hospital room, and watch as an interpreter translates the family discussion into American Sign Language and transmits your input via spoken English. Because the interpreter is fluent in both languages, making sure that you are involved and that there are no misunderstandings is no problem, you do not have to decipher a painstakingly slow conversation with ONE other person via a text relay call where you do not have the ability to interrupt and may not understand the typist's message at all. Because the typist is not an interpreter, and because English may be your second or third language, they may misunderstand your message as well. None of this is an issue on VRS. Instead, you, the Deaf caller is permitted to focus on what you should be focused on, the decision regarding your mother's life.

This is not a fictional story. This call actually took place through a video relay service between a person I know and their family. It left a profound and lasting impression on the Deaf person AND their family. Stories like this one abound in the Deaf community. Children and parents speak of being able to truly communicate with each other for the first time ever. Finally, Deaf callers can actually recognize and understand the TONE of the caller and therefore the overall intent of the message rather than just a string of words produced in a foreign language, completely devoid of context or emotion. They can do what hearing people do everyday on phone calls.....interrupt, take the floor, scream, curse, cry, laugh, etc.

This is access in the truest sense of the word, and it is in jeopardy! Interpreting services are expensive and technology needs research and development to evolve and to proceed. Video Relay is an expensive endeavor, but the funds are already ear-marked and available. Tax payers and phone companies contribute to that fund. The FCC needs to take a hard look at exactly what they are putting at risk with their decision to limit this funding.

Please don't let this happen. How many years have hearing people benefited by the use of the telephone? Shouldn't that tool be available readily and equally to all? Deaf people have been able to make a call in their own language for less than two years. This long awaited service has finally seen its day. Please help us make it a regular part of our social landscape, by adequately funding VRS.

Thank you for your time,  
Regina K. Schulz

